





**DONATED BY**

**Prof. A.N. KAUL**  
&  
**Prof. MYTHILI KAUL**  
(Department of English, DU)

**CENTRAL REFERENCE LIBRARY**  
**FOR CONSULTATION ONLY**

Call No. 0111, 1M93, 2A Acc. No. 1237735

Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see  
The wingèd Psyche with awakened eyes?  
KEATS

# THE LAMP

*By*

RICHARD CHURCH

LONDON

J. M. DENT AND SONS LTD.

*All rights reserved*  
*Made in Great Britain*  
*at The Temple Press Letchworth*  
*for*  
*J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.*  
*Aldine House Bedford St. London*  
*First published 1946*

TO  
DENIS SAURAT

*In Friendship,  
and for what he represents.*

## PROLOGUE

Let me be simple; let my music  
Capture a child's imagination.  
A difficult thought is not a thing  
A blackbird or a god will sing.  
Some have heard both. Let them in judgment  
Stand up, and give an ear to this  
Agony from the tree of bliss.

## PART I





So that a story shall not be forgotten,  
 Poets from age to age have told it afresh.  
 It is the tale of Eros and of Psyche,  
 The winged god and the woman loved, the rash  
 Importunity of reckless passion,  
 The lamp usurping faith, the mystery  
 Unveiled, the anger of a god, the flight,  
 The soul of man weeping through the night.

So that a story should not be forgotten,  
 Apuleius took it from the air,  
 Drifting thistledown wafted through time  
 From Plato's garden. Since the African  
 Turned the tale to confute a sceptical age,  
 Why should not I with like intention frame  
 The legend afresh, though Bridges, Pater, Morris  
 Told it so recently, to symbolize  
 Wisdom, a tree standing in the sun?

Here is reason enough; another age  
 Of disbelief, with empires of the mind  
 Tumbling into dust; with burning of books;  
 And in the débris of a broken world  
 The soul of man weeping through the night.

Deep in the heart of ravished France, below  
 The southern forest-edge of Fontainebleau,  
 A tributary of the river Seine  
 Companions a canal. Enclosed, a plain  
 Of richly watered cornland lies, remote  
 As a medieval house behind its moat;  
 Villages scattered here and there between  
 Canal and river, pin the cloak of green.  
 This is a land of poplars, pollard willows,  
 Miles of willow and poplar; white cloud-billows  
 Sail overhead, and barges on the stream  
 Float higher than the meadows; float and dream,  
 And sound a horn like Roland's at each bend.  
 Time has no beginning there, no end.  
 Green days, green nights commingle, each to each  
 Mirrored in waters, ever out of reach.  
 Nobody moves, except the folk who drift  
 Half maritime, half gypsy, with a lift  
 Of husky voices and a warning horn  
 Aboard the barges, waking a forlorn  
 Lost echo from that non-existent past  
 Which lies in human memory, the vast  
 And never-has-been reservoir of longing  
 For other worlds, with winged glories thronging  
 To comfort us, and by angelic mirth  
 Lift from our hearts the burden of this earth.

Below the level of the waters stood a farmhouse,  
 Three-sided, round a courtyard formerly for cattle,  
 But now a garden. Arches of roses, beds of zinnias,  
 The white-starred, scented jasmine with its leaves indented;  
 And, set by bleached distempered walls, flaming sunflowers  
 Suckling great humble-bees and innumerable smaller  
 Creatures of wing and sting and shrill trumpet. Surely  
 This artfully arrayed profusion of colour and perfume  
 Marked the close labour and indulgent delight of a woman?  
 To guard the single-storeyed range of ancient buildings,  
 On the fourth and open side were hand-wrought railings  
 And double gates, baroque iron-work, with scrollings  
 And fleurs-de-lys: all this open side over-shadowed  
 By a giant acacia that through the June month showered confetti  
 Over the lane to the hamlet, over the roofs and the forecourt,  
 Filling the rooms through the open windows with fragile petals,  
 Half transparent, half perfumed, like wings of butterflies  
 Smutched and wind-beaten.

How quiet and forgotten this corner  
 Of France, not far from the capital, gracious and cynical Paris:  
 Not far, but dropped out of time, entranced by the horn sounding  
 At the curve of the waters, where the breeze touched the aspens  
 and poplars  
 And set invisible seas lipping invisible beaches.

This was the country where Corot painted, watching the willows  
 Day after day in the summer haze, while the dragonflies  
 Darted about his easel, stabbing his vision  
 With blue bolts of light.

In a village along the canal  
Approaching Nemours, for centuries name-town of the Dauphins  
Of France, who held that shadow dukedom, lived the English  
Musician, the crippled Delius, like Corot also enchanted  
By the water-mood, and the quiet, green hamadryad  
Spirit of place.

Here, removed from the world, from fraying  
Ambition, Montaigne might have built his tower shrewdly;  
Or Voltaire, trowel in hand, with a mistress to label his seed-beds,  
Could have finished his days, and put pen to his eightieth  
volume

Here as in Ferney

Here, as much removed from the modern  
World of letters and wit as they from that of times vanished,  
Lived the Professor, ten years retired from his Faculty  
But not from the Greeks, their science, their art, their religion,  
Their profuse confusion of mysteries, the dark grove of Eleusis  
With its hint of Calvary and the stone rolled away from the  
sepulchre;

Or Delphi, where maybe the Holy Ghost was engendered  
In the spirit of Light, and reason's penetrating symbol,  
The word of the prophet, the word of the poet, that was in the  
beginning.

These were the matters that in his retreat he continued to ponder,  
Believing still that out of myth he might discover  
The fulcrum that balances faith and experience, spirit and body.  
Half absent from this world he spent his days in study,  
Contented, with his wife and one remaining daughter,  
To fortify his dwindling years and blend their seasons  
With annotations from the Weeping and Laughing Philosophers

## 4

The old Professor had reduced his life  
 To an habitual routine, a way  
 To simplify the round of night and day.  
 He left the job of living to his wife  
 And daughter, as the poet Villiers de l'Isle  
 Once left it to his servants. He seldom went  
 Beyond the courtyard gate, and was content  
 To let the world go by, for woe or weal.

He liked to take his after-luncheon slumber  
 Beneath the mulberry tree beside the well;  
 Coffee, cognac, and books set on a tray,  
 Round which the frogs forgathered without number,  
 To croak, from Aristophanes, a spell  
 That always worked, because he knew the play.

## 5

Madam, his wife, was gentle. Since 1740,  
 When her son disappeared, her reason had wavered.  
 She knew he was a prisoner in Germany  
 With all his regiment. That was enough  
 To keep her faith in human nature firm.  
 She knew he would come back. She knew that France  
 Would rise again, and that the miracle  
 Of holy living would repeat itself  
 And make the Church triumphant. But her hair  
 Went white, and day by day she failed to grasp

The trivial realities of servitude  
Imposed by the invader. The hand shook  
That sought to shield her household from contagion,  
The smaller degradations, hour by hour,  
That sap the character in slavery.  
She tried to hedge her scholar-husband's life  
And island him with comfort. But she failed,  
Just as a mother bird would fail whose nest  
Swings on a bough above a flooding river  
And dips from time to time as the waters shake  
The tree; dips, grows bedraggled, but is still  
Secure.

So this scholar's home in France,  
Seeming, in captivity, so changeless,  
Suffered as the jackboot months trod over it,  
And only pride concealed the dying habits,  
The daily symbols of a way of life  
That has made France the chatelaine of Europe,  
And kept the Roman spirit of the hearth  
Alive through the Dark Ages, surviving wars  
Of kings and demagogues.

But now, one woman,  
One wife and mother, could not take so much  
Upon her heart and mind, and trembling hands.  
She had to delegate to her last daughter  
This major burden, while sometimes she turned  
To the inaction of anxiety,  
That privacy of grief which a French mother  
Shrinks into when her son's captivity  
Serves as a shameful substitute for death.

## 6

Maybe the tale of treachery  
 Will never be told.  
 For when an evil is over  
 And anger grows old,  
 Some instinct, some shamefaced  
 Disapproval, will urge  
 To a burning of records.

Facts crumble, and merge  
 Like a castle of sand when incoming  
 Tides advance,  
 Flood over the shore, expunging  
 The print of man's chance  
 Or long-planned chaffer and traffic.

So the story of France  
 In the years of her over-ripeness,  
 When the harpies fed  
 On the Republic, the medlar  
 Rotten, bled  
 By the teeth of the traitor.

## 7

France waited, watching the desecration creep  
 Through Europe, saw nations tumbled over the steep  
 Precipice of slavery. But nothing was done  
 To break through the self-torture. One by one  
 She put the sharp-tongued omens to her breast  
 Like Cleopatra's asp. Then came the rest;



· The bolt drawn from within; despair and shame;  
The waste of strength apportioning the blame;  
The ancient factions waiting for this chance  
To murder France for love of vanished France.

8

Such cross-grained politics disturbed  
None of that household by the river.  
The old Professor's wife and daughter  
Fostered a receding legend  
That once he had lifted his absorbed  
And childlike mind, to hear of Dreyfus,  
And register such indignation  
That from the Sorbonne to Grenoble  
A hundred Faculties were shaken.  
No spring was brought by that one swallow.  
The scholar to his books returned  
And found his ancient world more real  
Than those hot feuds that raged in Paris.  
Enough for him that Troy once burned.  
He was more concerned to follow  
The intrigue Odysseus contrived,  
Than to double-cross some fellow  
In the academic world.  
Maybe that was why he thrived,  
For nobody feared him, none reviled  
Him or his work; he lived molested  
By no man; all revered and trusted  
Such innocence. So he grew old,

Successful in his unsuccess,  
Master of a ghostly kingdom  
Where no rival strove to press  
A claim, or to dispute the harvest.

So absolute was this example,  
That neither wife nor daughters ventured  
To criticize his way of life;  
At least, so long as they were near him,  
Under a roof-tree raised in Athens  
Rather than twentieth-century Paris.  
But when the elder daughters married,  
They learned the necessity of strife,  
And the ambition born of worries  
Over persons and position.  
Both these women took the fever  
Which all suffer from unknowing,  
And thus were lost to him for ever.

Now, grass-widowed, they were lodging  
Near by, in the crowded hotel  
Of the riverside town, their children  
Safely with them. The eldest daughter  
Knew her husband was a prisoner.  
The other husband was more skilful.  
A practised Deputy and Lawyer,  
He had the technique to ingratiate  
Himself, and distil some counsel  
In the ear of the invader.  
*This kept him detained in Paris*  
With occasional trips to Vichy,  
A modern Mercury whose missions

Had a certain classical cast  
His father-in-law would not have lost  
Had his interests been wider,  
With mild craving for possessions.

9

One golden morning,  
In the second summer of slavery,  
The orchard grasses  
Slipped their burden of dewdrops  
As the Daughter waded  
Through their waves of green-seed  
And riming blade.  
A blackbird sang in a poplar ;  
A yaffle darted  
From apple to plum-tree, derisive  
And raucous, startling  
Marie, who shivered, then laughing,  
Resumed her plunging  
Gait through the grass, her basket  
Poised on her hip.  
A silver net of moisture  
Weighed on her hair  
And webbed her cheeks and forearms.  
Once she looked ruefully  
At her drenched legs, and slippers  
Bedraggled with dew.  
Filtered from tree to tree,  
The level sunshine

In frosty fingers of light  
Touched single things;  
A stalk of cow-parsley, a brittle  
Mistletoe sprig  
Surviving from druid's winter;  
An eglantine  
Swinging with thorns concealed  
In a flush of petals.

Because of these things in the sunshine  
Marie sang.  
She sang to herself, not aloud  
As in a free country  
Where nothing is feared, no neighbour,  
No treacherous stone,  
No wall, or waft of air.  
But her song was joyous,  
Drawn like a beaker of water  
From a deep well  
Untouched by the dust of events  
And the heat of the day.  
She sang as she walked; her basket  
Riding the measure,  
A boat on the waves of her pleasure,  
Rolled on her hip  
In time with the tune on her lip.  
She sang to herself,  
Her dark eyes touching the sun-touched  
Mistletoe, rose-bush,  
Mop-headed grass, umbrella  
Of curd, almond-scented.

Her feet left a dew-bruised printing  
Out of the courtyard  
Straight from the door to the orchard  
In the pantiled wall.

Loudly the birds, softly the girl  
Sang that morning in France  
As though the dawn were truly  
Miraculous, free  
In the childhood of time.  
From a barge approaching a bend  
In the waist-high waterway,  
The horn of Roland sounded  
Its throaty, long  
Tremulous cry of bewilderment,  
Lonely and lost.

20

Lonely and lost! That was the voice of France;  
A widow's voice, her beauty heightened by grief.  
The woman in the orchard may, perchance,  
Pausing to shift her basket, for a brief  
Moment knowing she would need her breath  
Against a morning's labour by the water,  
She may have felt that intimation of death  
Clutch at her heart. Was she not a daughter  
Of France? Maybe she felt the joy of morning,  
The thousand recognitions of sun and earth,

Stabbed suddenly by this note of warning,  
Frosted in the moment of their birth.  
Fingers of light from apple-patterned skies  
Touched her bent head, but failed to touch her eyes.

11

Light lost, and song dying  
Of shame for its own happiness,  
Marie left the orchard lattice  
Of sunbeams, shadows, and leafy shapes.  
Canal curve, and tall poplars  
Curving in a cliff of green,  
Held, almost hidden, a stone hut  
Half roofed, half open to the sky.  
Within, a washing pool, surrounded  
By a narrow ledge where women knelt  
To beat and blanch their loads of linen.  
Here with her basket Marie came  
To find herself alone. A fern  
Of hart's-tongue gleamed by the stone lintel,  
Rich with moisture, bedded in moss.  
A frog leaped, and the pool chuckled,  
Throwing green streaks of underwater  
Lustre up the walls in ripples.  
Drip, drip, from beneath the ledge  
Where the stone was tongued by the lipping water  
Restless from impulse far away,  
Some tidal urge that gave it motion  
Long belated and quite forgotten.

The walls were fustianed with damp,  
Soft blotches of green and amber moss  
Veiled in a bloom of mistiness.  
The water looked drier than the stone,  
For it was smooth, and deep, and bright.  
It shone like an eye lit with suspicion.  
Above all this the poplars loomed,  
Conspiring too, perpetual whisperers,  
Nudging and rustling though no winds blew.  
The barge from which the horn had sounded  
Passed while the girl paused in the doorway.  
She watched the prow dispel the mirror ;  
Saw the reflected world shattered  
Into a welter of tossing colours.  
The chugging engine beat its drum  
Muffled by its monotony.  
There was no other sound. The helmsman  
Crouched with his arm drooped over the tiller.  
Near him a grey-green faceless figure  
Sat on a tub, nursing a rifle.  
Neither looked up to greet the woman.  
Something oppressed them both, it seemed,  
Blinded them to the passing pageant  
Of France.

Marie turned her head :  
But had she been a block of granite  
Time-vestured like the mossy walls,  
Helmsman and guard could not have shown  
Less curiosity. Behind  
The barge, the drumbeat of the engine,  
The seeming-sounding ripple of the wake

Shaking the iris blades by the bank,  
There faded the echo of Roland's horn;  
Roland's horn with fading echo  
Sadder than any new-born sorrow.

12

With song, and with the memory of song  
Quenched in her heart and on her lip,  
She followed the foreboding cry along  
The bank of the canal.  
She saw the barge beneath the wide bridge dip,  
And for a moment fall  
Out of existence, then rise again  
Into the mesh of sunlight between  
The double poplar-screen.  
The two men also disappeared  
And re-emerged. She felt a spasm of pain  
Assail her: all she had feared  
For France, since the invader came,  
Suddenly gathered to coherent shape  
As though the shadow of that arch could frame  
Living disaster, and make of it a tale  
Whose allegory no one might escape  
Until all human values fail.

13

Slowly the barge rounded the further bend,  
Winding its horn again. The engine throbbed,  
Diminishing with the wavelets on the water.



The broken mirror gradually regained  
Its calm, reflective face, though trembling still,  
So that the double of the poplars shook  
In watery syncopation against rustling leaves.  
But soon even this small drama smoothed away,  
And left the world a counterfeit of peace.

24

The young Frenchwoman turned, and left the towpath,  
Intending to bestir herself for time lost  
In dreaming sadly after singing gladly.  
But as she looked toward the covered pool,  
Fear touched her, warning her to wait.

Such intimations in a happy land  
Mean little, maybe; but in a land enslaved  
By a cold and mad invader, they become  
The Maquis of the mind, the messengers  
That tap the midnight window, the corner-voice  
That disappears upon a word, the hand  
Seen on the silent closing of a door.  
Marie looked before she moved, and saw  
Or thought she saw, a man's shadow leap  
The gloomy entrance to the covered pool.  
Her fear-drugged mind accepted this illusion.  
'Take care!' she cried. It was her instinct speaking,  
The instinct of a people in captivity  
Given an individual voice as danger  
Flickered here, there, a marsh-fire over death.

As she cried, she heard footsteps behind her,  
The tread of jackboots turning from the bridge,  
Crunching on gravel, muffling over grass,  
Treading toward her down the towpath under  
The poplars, where the ink-blue dragonflies  
Still held their traffic, though the world was changed.

She dared not cry again. She waited, watched;  
Watched for the shadow, craving not to see it;  
Seeing the Germans, though she loathed to look.

15

First, the Captain stopped  
Halfway over the bridge,  
To lean above the ledge.  
The yellow iris looped  
Along the towpath edge  
Recalled another scene  
Of waters nearer home.  
A wafted scent of lime  
Added to the burden.  
Desperate, and alone,  
He saw a northern garden  
Whose long grass by the lake  
In melancholy green  
Almost overpowered  
The beds where dahlias  
Drooped stalkily, yet flowered.

Day-dreaming, he saw  
The sister whom he loved  
Pause by a clump of laurel  
To cough. He saw her drop  
Her scissors, and clutch the air,  
Believing he was there.  
Those moments which he lived  
In double-reality,  
The world behind the eye,  
Filled him with dread. The drip  
Of moisture from the arch  
To the canal below,  
Might be her life-blood falling.  
In this fusion of two worlds  
He thought he heard her calling.  
What mirage the mind builds  
On the hunger of the soul!  
Summoning his will  
To banish the cruel dream,  
He stood on the bridge, but still  
In the iris blades beneath  
He heard the scythe of death.  
'Leutnant!' he cried, 'Who 's there?'  
The youth in boots and belt  
Could not understand.  
He stared, but neither felt  
Nor saw. Hastily he put  
A heavy, nervous hand  
To his revolver butt.  
But then he laughed, seeing  
A woman on the bank,

Half invisible  
Beneath the poplar-trees.  
The Captain saw him wink,  
Heard his throaty chuckle.  
The morning sun shone clear  
On badge, belt and buckle,  
And the relief from fear.

16

She waited while the officers approached.  
Leaf-shadows flickered up their uniforms.  
A blackbird shrieked across the path, his coat  
And armour bright as theirs. The young Leutnant,  
Pretending that he held a catapult,  
Raised arms and hands, and with a clucking tongue  
Sent the imaginary pebble flying.

She saw the boyish gesture. A half-smile,  
Bitter and bewildered, touched her mouth  
And for one second broke the white lips' tension.  
Instantly she was a mask again,  
Her eyes in shadow watching the shadows rushing  
Over the men and breaking behind them in shapes  
Of dancing dustmotes.

The Captain saluted.  
Behind his arm she saw the fern-fringed doorway  
Darken again with that presage from some hidden  
Form that moved. She prayed for strength to avert  
Her eyes, and instantly a second prayer  
—While the saluting German arm came down—

Followed the first, that the averted gaze  
Might be stopped before it should be seen.  
Dreading to look, yet dreading to look away,  
She played for time by letting her basket slip.  
'Hup!' the younger jackboot cried, pretending  
To catch it for her. But she did not smile.  
Gravely she looked at him, and bowed her head.  
A moment's pause, before the Captain spoke  
Shyly, yet gruffly, with a commanding glance  
At his subordinate.

'Mademoiselle!

An English plane is down. It was returning  
From its night errand, death-dealing over Germany.  
Four of the crew were killed. The wounded man  
Is in our doctors' care. That leaves another  
Still to be found. He may be wounded too,  
And will not travel far, unless the people  
Hide him. I hope they will not, for their own sakes.  
You know the penalty. Persuade your neighbours  
To take no hand in this, for their own sakes;  
And for their children's too.'

She saw his eyes  
Clouded with fear. Of what was he afraid?

## 17

Or was it her fear reflected there,  
The frozen world in which she lived?  
Though spring might break from the ground, and song  
From her lips, the colour and sound were cold,

The flowers rooted in the soil of France,  
The song in a Frenchwoman's heart.

She looked back through the orchard, saw  
The bruised grass where she had walked  
Singing through the flowers. Or was it  
Another self, a second self,  
A creature of a former time  
Sweet with sanity, whose hours  
Made music of the moments, adding  
Day unto day, year unto year?

Who then was this, facing the Germans,  
Standing before these mirrors of fear  
And praying to herself, commanding  
Herself, lest she should glance again  
At the place where she had seen the shadow,  
And in that glance betray the shadow  
And him she believed behind it, watching?

18

Fighting the horror of this question, she stood before them  
Defenceless, her eyes evasive, curtained with the fear of fear,  
Which is the last approach to the dark citadel  
Of self, where our resources against fate are locked,  
So that, until the day, we never know our strength.  
The German officers watched a young woman standing  
Behind her basket, her hands tight-clasped, the knuckles white.  
They watched her white face too, the indrawn bloodless lips.

The Captain, hardly from his recent daydream drawn,  
Saw a laurel bush beside her; heard her cough.  
So swift was the illusion that he almost stooped  
To the flower-scissors which he had heard drop on the towpath.

Towpath? No, that was wrong. It was on German grass,  
Not this French, mossy gravel. He compelled himself  
To put the anxious agony of love away,  
Cursing the very chance that two women could be dark-haired,  
Pale of face, and so appealing in simplicity.  
He saw the bush of laurel fade. His Leutnant stood  
Beside her, more solicitous than need be.  
A quick spasm of anger shook the Commandant.  
'Carry the basket for her,' he said. 'She is unwell.'

29

At first, her reason did not take the words,  
For she was looking past the covered pool,  
To wonder what had brought her father out.  
He stood within the doorway in the wall,  
Knee-deep in orchard grass, darkened by trees.  
But she saw his hand clasping his white beard.  
That was his token of anxiety,  
Denoting a return, but temporary,  
To the world around him, people and affairs  
Of the living moment. He had heard something,  
A matter that would interrupt his studies?  
What would it be; something to give substance  
To the shadow that she dared not look for now?

But with that realization the words came home  
More fateful by delay. She felt the life  
Flood back into her eyes, but warily,  
For nothing must be shown. Her face was flushed,  
And seeking to hide it, she stooped, seized the basket,  
Pretending to ignore the horrible courtesy  
Of these invaders. But how could she prevent  
What was a German officer's command?

20

The young Lieutenant too had flushed.  
Resentment and obedience  
Fought in his eyes. Obedience won,  
Aided by that self-interest,  
Which flourishing on servility,  
Grows subtle and original,  
And ape of true intelligence.  
He thought his Commandant had shown  
Some amorous interest in the woman:  
Therefore he 'd serve it, though it meant  
This insult to his uniform.  
One day, the foot that trod him now  
Would slip or stumble on the road  
Grown so crooked in the Service.  
One would be waiting and remembering.

Such a man as this half-hearted  
Dreamer and priggish reader of books  
Would never master the new Machine.  
Yes, one would wait; one would remember.



Meanwhile, lest the heavens should fall,  
And the Reich itself be shaken—  
Obedience! He snatched up the basket.

22

Maybe, Judas marching to the Garden  
Among the soldiers, found the way no longer  
Than these few metres measured to the Frenchwoman.  
She felt the moments cease, she watched them harden  
Into the shape of treachery, time the traitor,  
And time the overseer of her action.  
How could she cheat this tyrant, change the minutes  
To hours, and stretch those hours ever longer  
Until a century should intervene  
To separate the poplar-shadowed bank  
From that stone doorway shadowed now by death?

She knew her agony must not be seen;  
But somehow time must be arrested.

‘Father!’

Her heart cried out in silence to the old man  
Who peered, seeking her, under the apple-trees.  
But then she saw that by him stood another.  
It was the lawyer’s wife.

The moments shrank  
More cold, more swift. A little cup could hold them,  
Time’s distillate, a draught of treachery.  
She saw her sister grasp that cup, and drink.

She followed the jackboots ;  
 A woman walking to sacrifice,  
 Head bent, with eyes downcast.  
 The air clung cold about her,  
 And weighed upon the grass.  
 Slowly, and with ceremony,  
 Pace by numbered pace,  
 The solemn boy-lieutenant  
 Trod the flowers, trod  
 The dew-laced pathway, trod  
 The road of wrath to come.  
 She knew she could do nothing.  
 But straining past that knowledge  
 Her nerves and will united,  
 Dangerously groping  
 Past poor human power.  
 Prevent! Prevent! Prevent!  
 The jackboots on the gravel  
 Both omen were, and warning,  
 Drawing to decision.

Another moment now,  
 And the shadow hidden  
 Innocently within,  
 As a soul inhabits  
 Closer in the body  
 When reason's light is doused ;  
 One half-moment now,  
 Two more jackboot paces,

And the shadow-thrower  
Would be seen, and captured.

One more pace—but suddenly  
Pride rebelled! The jackboots  
Stopped, turned, looked past her,  
Threw the basket down  
At the moss-green threshold,  
And with a boy's contempt  
Marched back to the towpath  
Where the Captain waited  
Already half-forgetting  
An incident so small.

23

Stooping to her burden once again  
She did not see the illusion for the third  
Time, nor its ominous substance, a bird  
Wing-spread above its shadow, and less plain,  
Which glided from the covered pool, and seemed  
To swim with under-water strokes on air,  
Making for some invisible landing, where  
Gods traffic in the terrors men have dreamed.

Disturbed, maybe, by footsteps at the portal,  
The white owl woke, and fled its human shrine  
To find some place more fittingly immortal,  
Where, with pinions closed again, it might  
Stand sentinel by wisdom; half divine,  
Half monstrous symbol of the realm of night.

## PART II



WISDOM, a tree standing in the sun,  
 Must throw its shadow. Wisdom,  
 A white owl on the wrist of God  
 Spreading her wings to bring judgment,  
 Must have some dark forerunner.

Before the gate that boding stood,  
 And Marie saw her sister waiting,  
 Grey-faced and anguished, tapping  
 The crumbled brickwork of the step  
 With an impatient foot. 'Marie!'  
 She whispered. It was a mother's voice,  
 Close and protective. 'Be quick! Quick!'

But Marie had a greater burden;  
 The presence by the pool, the watchers  
 By the bank. She felt the drag  
 Behind her, unsubstantial, strong.  
 Each foot now was manacled,  
 Trod grass leaden with dew  
 And barred with metal beams of sunshine.  
 She dared not look back, she dared not look  
 Before her, to wonder what had happened,  
 What was toward. She heard her father  
 Speak in his hesitant voice, its tone  
 Flattened in the trance of thought.

He called her too. 'Marie,' again  
Crept through the orchard, a warning word  
Of fear: Marie, a woman's name,  
The universal name, God's mother,  
The name upon the hearth, the name  
Upon the altar; earth and heaven;  
The name, at last, of sacrifice.

2

Approaching, she set down her basket,  
And instantly saw her sister's eyes take fire  
With cunning and suspicion, instantly smothered.  
'The Commandant and his Lieutenant came.  
I do not care to work in there alone  
While they are near.'

She felt the disbelief  
Torture her sister's mind. It was the doubt  
Whose poison lay upon the soil of France,  
To touch whoever trod there, lime the wings  
Of love, if that winged god should come to France  
Under such omens, calling forlornly, seeking  
The human soul, Psyche, emblem of faith.

3

Through the open door in the wall  
Sunlight poured, a golden traffic  
Of mote and wing.

It set a halo, a holy ring  
Of spiritual fire  
About the old man's hair.  
From this nimbus of chance light  
His eyes looked out, troubled, bewildered,  
Searching here, searching there  
Beyond the reach of human sight.  
He listened, but he did not hear  
His elder daughter pleading,  
Her voice narrow with passion, thin  
From a throat gripped by fingers of fear.

'Go into the house,' he said. 'Go in,  
And let me talk with Marie.'

'But if you talk with Marie,  
What then? She too is obstinate  
And will never understand. Marie!  
It is always Marie! She is free  
To come and go as she will,  
Not imprisoned like me  
And my sister, in motherhood.  
Oh Father—this will drive me mad!'  
She was not wicked, standing in the sun,  
Whipped by the rods of light.  
Bowed with fear, impersonally sad,  
A mother of French children, she pleaded  
Vaguely, as a mortal pleads to God,  
Beyond the decent bounds of wrong and right.



'Father, they are offering you freedom,  
And safety for us all: a position for you,  
Recognizing your age, and what you are.  
This is a tribute to your long life's work.  
It means protection for your family,  
And safety for the children. Father, it is for them!'

She turned her back on her younger, childless sister,  
And touched her father where he stood by the wall  
Blocking the traffic of bees, that swerved to pass him,  
Light from the hive, and heavily returning.

4

He put her hand from his arm  
Sadly, and shook his head.  
A defaulter from the swarm  
Following the daughter's hand,  
Paused to rest on his sleeve,  
Dragging its panniers, red  
With the burden of gathered gold.  
'I do not understand,'  
At last the scholar said.  
'Can freedom be bought or sold?'  
He watched the bee take wing,  
Stumbling first, then assured  
And lost in the loud procession.

Then, turning inward to himself, he pondered;  
'There was another meaning to this word

In those young days of Hellas, when Phthia  
Was still obscure in Thessaly, the unknown  
Village where the seed of wisdom woke,  
To spread and flower in Athens, Syracuse,  
Tarentum and Cyrene, filling the world  
With fragrance that touched the imagination of man  
And made him defy the gods. That fragrance was freedom.  
Is this the flower that you offer me?’

All summer answered him.  
The laughter of the sun,  
The apple blossom;  
The voice of another France,  
Rameau’s cuckoo, twice  
In happy mockery  
Shouting from afar;  
A breath of southern air  
Plucking at the poplars  
With a music of harps.  
Laughter shook the orchard,  
And a million petals  
Fluttered down, touched  
The professor’s beard:  
Apple blossom petals,  
Pink, and honey-fingered,  
Clung about the pedant  
Prosing in the orchard.

As they passed through the gate in the garden wall,  
Marie paused in the doorway, lingered  
There, basket again on her hip,

Awaiting that whisper of chance  
Which the hopeful heart for ever has overheard.

She saw two figures walking away  
Along the waterside, stage-high  
On the path beneath the poplar trees.

The air came sweet again to eye and lip.  
Earth, with its own fidelities,  
The promise of night, the promise of day,  
Sealed them with a sudden, single cry,  
An owl's voice for authority.

5

Father and daughters entered the kitchen, to find the lawyer  
Leaning over the mother's chair. She sat at the table,  
Her hands on the table, staring at nothing, listening to nothing,  
Yet hearing enough of his tale to be shaken, to be tortured and  
broken  
With doubts, and a painful thrusting of hope out of old despair.  
'Now *you* must speak!' they heard him whisper, as he  
straightened and turned  
To greet them. They could not see to his soul, for the light  
from the window  
Set marbled on his spectacles, made them a mirror  
Reflecting conjecture, distrust, fear. His broad face shone  
With sweat. 'Tell him he must accept!' said the traitor's voice.

Yvonne, the white-haired serving-woman from the village,  
Set down a steaming jug, and stood grimacing at it.  
'Coffee!' she whispered, and all the irony of France  
Lay on her dry, cracked lips. The notary took the jug,  
Filled a cup, tasted, turned abruptly to Yvonne,  
And chuckled. A conspirator's laugh shook him, shook  
The hand that held the cup, the coffee in the cup,  
Shook the web of light mirrored from the liquid,  
Making it leap about the ceiling. 'Mother of God!  
But this *is* coffee!' He nudged the old woman under her ribs,  
But she felt nothing through her armoury of black,  
The boned dress of the Catholic peasant. She stared in distaste  
And spoke, emphatically not addressing herself to him.  
'If one is vigilant, there are ways of getting a little.'  
Contempt and hatred overlay the irony.  
Then, with a gesture of finality, she wiped  
Her hands on her coarse apron, as though soiled with blood.

The traitor dropped his bluff pretence of shared conspiracy.  
'Take care!' he said, 'Take care; or it's trouble for us all.'  
He drank the coffee. Then with it shining on his lips,  
He turned to the old matriarch, to urge her again,  
When Yvonne interrupted. She spoke to the lawyer's wife,  
Accusation veiled because here was one of the family.  
'You are in Montigny. Is it true they are taking the metal,  
Robbing the kitchens there? But everything is true of them!'  
With this, she began to unhook from the wall the copper sauce-  
pans.

Golden sunshine in the kitchen lost its warmth,  
Lacking these familiar and sovereign reflectors.

'How should I notice these things while my children are in danger?

Oh, the gross materialism of the world!

France deserves this ignominy. Since the Revolution

Her people have prized nothing but wealth, and worldly comfort.'

The young mother could say no more. She turned in anger, A gesture that accused the whole of guilty France.

Yvonne, close and obstinate, meanwhile gathered her treasure,

Tramping in and out, carrying it away from the kitchen

Piece by piece. 'Take care to hang something else on the hooks,'

Said the tempter, 'or they 'll ask you what you 've taken away!'

'I can look after my own,' she retorted. 'See to your affairs!'

But he understood the peasant, and chuckled with cunning approval,

Then gave himself again to the more important matter,

Wooing by rhetoric where his wife had failed by fear.

## 6

'Father, distinguished and revered,

Head of our family, a king

In the country of the mind,

It is an honourable thing

The Marshal offers you to-day.

In that knowledge, need you have feared

The venom critics always find

Whenever mortals do or say

Something decisive, definite?

All your life you have stood alone  
Above the factions and the cliques,  
Respected as a man who seeks  
Truth's solitary, sacred light.  
You have made the Greek world your **own**.  
Now, by this God-given chance  
You can unite that world to France.  
Since for us the war is over,  
We must be jealous for the fame  
Of France. We have much to recover.  
Our culture, scholarship, and art  
Are tainted with political shame.  
You, in retirement, had no part  
In that disaster. France will learn  
New self-respect from your return.

You think you are too old; the Marshal  
Is not too old to guide the State  
Between the occupying Power  
And' our once dangerous Allies.  
You likewise must comply with Fate  
And in our universities  
Serve France at this eleventh hour.'

7

'He means a Rectorship is offered you!'  
The angry woman broke through the oration.  
'Under the present Government, this brings  
Protection from the Germans. You must accept!  
Father, you must think of our children's safety.'

The old man looked at her. 'I wish I knew  
How to believe in your proposed oblation.  
But dare the god of love with fragile wings  
Touch the barbarian?' Gabrielle wept,  
Cursing the simpleton, meek and uncrafty.

8

The conflict turned to stone;  
Tension and strain  
Like the Laocoon  
Which for two thousand years  
Has held all human fears  
In sculpture made plain.

So now the chisel-blade  
Of circumstance  
Carved the frozen air,  
Fixed the terror there  
In a graven dance  
Of timelessness made.

9

Marie, standing apart from the others, saw  
With trouble-quicken'd eye,  
Pinions beating at the window-pane.  
They fluttered through the bounds of natural law,  
Half dormant still, kissing her dormant mind,

Waking it to see that god of love  
Invoked by her father. Then, on earth again,  
She watched a butterfly  
Whose wings still damp with sleep  
Shivered in the sun.

Light, with shadow instantly behind,  
The real and the fantasy,  
Closed on each other in her memory,  
Two images marrying to one,  
Their strange fertility to prove.

She watched the wide-winged fire  
Veer in the spiritual storm  
Beating between the old man and his wife,  
The image of all purified desire,  
The god of love, the frail fritillary.  
She heard it prompting them to speech,  
Whispering some flowerlike word to try  
The constancy and faith of each to each,  
A code to understanding built through life,  
With joy nested in grief to keep it warm,  
And years beneath an uneventful sky,  
Secret and gradual, in sweet content,  
Making their hearts more rich the more they spent.

Every one was waiting for that word.  
The old Professor stood within the doorway,  
Still saintly with his nimbus from the sun.  
His hair and beard, from some unseen caress,  
Stirred in the light with little flames of silver.



Furthest from him, sitting in the shadow,  
He saw his wife.

‘What do you say, mother?’

He spoke in sadness, but with certainty.

The sounds of morning intervened. A cuckoo  
Shouting in the orchard; a bourdon-bee  
Cornered in a cranny, angrily buzzing;  
Ducks arguing their way between two ponds;  
And still, from time to time, that Roland’s horn  
Mourning round the curves of the canal:  
These recognizable, while, half withdrawn  
And falling granted by the human ear,  
The overtone of water, air, and earth  
Whirling with silent music round the sun.

She smoothed her apron with her troubled hands,  
Swayed forward, blindly stared upon the ground,  
Then answered him, but did not lift her head.  
‘Our son is in their power.’

Gabrielle wept,  
Stricken with grief and fear. ‘And my son too,  
And Antoinette’s, and all the sons of France.’

20

So, throughout that day  
The storm of sorrow,  
Deep and primeval mother-love,  
Rolled in, to break upon the gentle heart  
With strength more vast than anger.

There he stood alone,  
Obdurate, rocklike, simple,  
Epitome of human thought and will  
Dangerously beaten at.

A long life spent among the passions  
Of gods and heroes in the fabulous world,  
Hellas and Rome set in the poets' cool  
And shining crystal of words,  
Was now assailed with close and terrible waves,  
Currents and tides confused,  
Dragging him down  
Into the cauldron of uncertainty.

22

Night came with no decision.  
All day had conflict raged,  
Making that house a miniature of France.  
Anger, cunning, deceit,  
Instinct grown treacherous,  
Simple faith at war with simple fear,  
The subtle whisperings  
Of terror, the secret voice  
Of duty, all contorted in the war  
Within a war, a people  
Broken in defeat.

Then, toward dusk, with the household gathered again  
In the darkening room, the old Professor relented,  
Promised to go with his daughter Gabrielle  
Into Montigny, for Antoinette to plead.

Marie watched them to the courtyard gate;  
The fumbling with the latch beneath the pool  
Of shadow settled round the giant acacia.  
The breeze had dropped, but still some petals fell  
Slowly, seeming suspended in the air,  
Each one a lantern of the evening light.  
She saw her father bowed under his burden,  
Cruelly used by circumstance too heavy,  
And too late. The menace of the shadow  
Suddenly closed over the bent figure  
In that moment pausing at the gate.

He was a stranger to her: strangers too  
Were Gabrielle, and the notary, her husband,  
The friend of Vichy, the man of unknown creed,  
Or none, maybe. Marie stood alone,  
Watching them diminish down the road  
Toward the bridge so lately desecrated  
By the tread of jackboots crossing the canal.

12

Marie stood alone, watching  
The last of daylight fall and fail  
Behind the poplar grove.

She could not return at once to the searching  
Eyes. She saw the night sky fill  
With stars. The planet of love,

The mother of the winged god  
Who flies invisible by night,  
Shone over the low hill.

Slowly Aphrodite, naked  
Beauty in a crescent of light,  
Tremulous, fragile, pale,

Ventured on her journey, pricking  
Lightly over the poisoned sky  
Of prostituted France.

Dove-breasted vapours followed, waking  
Echoes of rainbow, rising high  
Before the queen's advance.

The scholar's daughter could recognize  
The immortal wanton, the superb  
Giver and taker of love.

From Venus, by habitual ways  
She looked for the son, with his arrow and barb  
Beyond the poplar grove.

By many a path of childhood seeking  
Its familiar symbol and myth  
Learned at her father's knee,

She returned to the image of Eros waking,  
Ranging the night-world, as a moth  
Velvet with secrecy.

So sharp the present indecision,  
The conflict between love and shame,  
That her mind stood

Midway between event and vision,  
Confusing power, form and name  
Of human and of god.

23

With that, she too set out for Montigny,  
Crossing the bridge in the light of the risen moon:  
Crossing, but returning to the parapet  
To look along the canal, whose waters lay  
Leaden, silent. Suddenly a fish  
Leaped, and changed the lead to quicksilver  
That lumbered, broke from waves to wavelets  
Faster and faster, tipped with chilly fire,  
Then overlapped to lead again, and closed  
To a smooth heaviness beneath the moon.  
Interpreting this incident by means  
Of the heart's logic, the reason beyond reason,  
She knew herself commanded once again,  
Summoned to service. Fearfully, she turned  
Back over the bridge, and down by the canal,  
Treading the path those fatal men had taken  
When day was clean and she had dared to sing.

The trees conspired above her, whispering  
In the still night. They glittered in the moon

And shook their little armour, throwing gleams  
Of steel across the mirror of the water :  
Darkness beneath them, black and absolute,  
Broken only by the moonlit stone  
Roofing the pool. For the second time that day  
She ventured toward it. A nightingale began  
To sing in a low branch. She paused close by  
The throbbing little body, felt the heat  
And passion of that high, lingering cry,  
Then the break into a glut of sorrow,  
The sound of grief turned to an inward tumult  
Surging in the caverns of the heart.  
Across the water, sorrow answered sorrow.  
Another and another broke restraint  
Until the poplar grove beyond the bridge  
Was one mad music over the woman creeping  
Toward the myth that held the honour of France.

Misled by imagination, she saw the airman  
Lurking there, wing-wounded, from a world  
Still free, still master of its fate, choosing  
Its own, to succour them, to bring the torch  
Of glory, for their eyes to follow it  
Through this morass of shame and slavery.  
The torch! The golden wings! The attributes  
Of Eros, lifelong, close, familiar symbols  
To the old pedant's daughter. Now the fallen  
Airman and god, the actual, the myth,  
Fused in the furnace of terror, fed day by day  
And night by night with an increasing fear,

A gradual intensity, consuming  
All barriers between the separate worlds  
Which man inhabits, with sanity for passport.

Hymned by nightingales, she trod the grove  
Toward the altar where freedom lay in peril.  
She saw the moonlight shining there, an opal  
Of cold fire in the shadow under the trees.  
She knew that she must worship there, she knew  
That she must minister to freedom there,  
Offering herself to save the soul of France.

14

The Commandant returned alone,  
No Prussian bully in the moonshine.  
He was transformed, his head drooping,  
Bared to the night. His hands were locked  
Behind his back, the nervous fingers  
Working together, intertwined.

From time to time he stopped, turned round,  
Waited, muttering, then resumed  
His way, still with the mind's burden  
Poised upon those clutching fingers,  
Its bulk upon the bent back.

The weariness of love dragged him  
To the Baltic boundary of Europe,  
Abusing his muscles with hundreds of miles  
In imagination's journey.

His body ached in breast and bone,  
Halted, protesting its fatigue.  
But that will beyond the will  
Whipped it on again, with cords  
Knotted in anxiety.

Mind is the torturer of man,  
Withdrawing him from pleasure, the full  
Satisfaction of the flesh,  
Changing the instant lust  
To hesitant, fine-drawn  
And long-delayed desires  
That often reach beyond the grave.

Mind is the maker of promises,  
Setting a mortgage upon death  
With thought, and golden recollection.

Mind is the maker of love;  
Through disappointment, sacrifice,  
A thousand cruel uncertainties,  
Working on this mother flesh,  
This warm immediate earth,  
Begetting a child with wing and barb,  
The ever-unaccountable  
Boy-god, powerful and elusive.



The Commandant returned alone.  
 But he was not alone.  
 A company of recollection  
 Surrounded him with chattering silence,  
 Snatches of unheard music,  
 The music shared at home in Hanover  
 In that great house upon the plains,  
 Remote among unchanging forests.

He saw the lakes gold-fringed with sand,  
 The wild-fowl rising under the sky,  
 Tiny and desolate beneath the clouds  
 Gathered at evening with pompous banners,  
 Or, at winter daybreak, piling  
 Eastward, to overwhelm the sun.

He prayed to that great solitude,  
 His birthright, deep within his bones.  
 But prayer was inarticulate,  
 Shaped by instinct, deeper than conscience.  
 Conscience indeed! Conscience alone  
 Had driven him to this, the trade  
 Hereditary, unquestioned till now.  
 His father and his father's father,  
 Huntsmen and fighters, holding their land  
 And serfs under Valhalla's gods:  
 The chase, the trips to Italy,  
 Office under the Emperors,  
 Marriage and hospitality,

Arrogant life and arrogant death,  
The family, the rule of Caste :  
These were his inheritance.  
Why then this fear of his own kind,  
The loneliness amid the triumph  
And swagger of the victorious bully ?  
For he liked none of this, the outcome  
Of his ancestral way of life.  
He had seen the trampling of the corn,  
The snatching of the widow's vineyard,  
The collusion of the professional soldier  
With the rigger of markets, the nimble-witted  
Financier, creature of one faith,  
The faith of gold, and getting gold,  
With its cold priesthood of power!

He had seen the new doctrine seize  
Upon the throat of Germany,  
Strangling the voice of Goethe  
And the song of the medieval folk  
At the Christmas cradle of God.

Fear of this arrogant ignoramus  
Born in the servility between  
Two unnecessary wars ;  
The brute irregularly fed,  
Starved in infancy, debauched  
In adolescence, cheated in manhood ;  
This brute now in the neighbour's house

To pillage and defile the signs  
Of freedom, and the beauty of freedom,  
Sweet privacy, and the still small voice  
Of individual dignity :  
Fear of the weapon in its maw,  
The bludgeon of the scientists ;  
Fear of the cold efficiency,  
The index, the office, the torture chamber,  
The knock upon the door by night,  
The long memory of revenge,  
The judge cringing before the jailer,  
The rape of truth, and beauty bleeding :  
Fear of all this, fear, fear  
By day, by night, poisoning food,  
Poisoning thought, poisoning love.

The Commandant returned alone,  
A changeling still, child of his house  
But a stranger there, and in the world.  
He heard the foreign murmur of air  
In the French poplars by the canal.  
The unfamiliar water gleamed  
Suspiciously toward the moon.  
He saw a white owl rise above  
The bridge, and drop into the shadow  
Detectively, seeking its prey.  
The warm breath of the fragrant night  
Shuddered behind it ; a tiny feather  
Floated, where the hunter had touched  
A twig ; floated, too light to fall,  
Yet, for lack of purpose, falling.

The owl smoothly disappeared  
Somewhere under the shining roof  
Above the pool where he had seen  
The illusion, the figure of his sister,  
His twin, the other half of life,  
The meaning of all things, the only  
Understanding in this world  
To which he was misborn, a Prussian  
Soldier, with the body and brain  
Of a man of contemplation.

16

Hear the fugue of fate,  
Theme after theme.  
Unwitting, we state  
In life or in dream  
Theme after theme:  
Then learning by rote  
Our part in the scheme,  
We hear the fugue of fate  
And float on the stream,  
Each mortal a note  
Adding theme after theme  
To the flood in full spate,  
The fugue of fate.

The young Lieutenant, reared from boyhood in such courses,  
 Followed his superior, whom he despised  
 As a man of books, and dubious loyalty to the Reich;  
 An oldtime aristocrat, not one of the New Order.

He walked upon the field-side of the poplar-trunks  
 Along a mossy ledge, the rim's-edge of the canal  
 Banked over the swollen roots, then dropping to the level  
 Of orchard, corn-patch, meres, and stretches of marshy waste.

He moved like a conspirator. He was a conspirator,  
 Reared in an atmosphere of garish melodrama,  
 Cut off from the sweet sanity of Europe's faith.  
 A wasted generation in the history of man  
 Shrank into the shadows of the trees of France  
 Where Sisley once had painted, and Delius heard the cuckoo  
 Open in spring, heard the same music as that which to-night  
 Poured out upon the dogma-deafened and brutal ears  
 Of this be-medalled barbarian, so clever and cunning.  
 More clever than moonlight, more cunning than the crescent  
 Fire from Venus in her quarter of the summer heaven,  
 The fox in grey-green uniform, from tree to tree  
 Glided unseen, unseeable, a shade in shadow,  
 Stealthy, persistent, forever watching as he went.

He watched the unsuspecting figure of his Captain  
 Who, though he paused from time to time, looked back, prepared  
 To call but did not call, was really unexpectant,  
 Thinking the young blood off on some youthful indiscretion  
 In the back streets of Nemours, returned like a dog to its vomit.

A dangerous dog! Perversely trained to the savage hunt  
And misrule of the pack, member of a million  
Booted and buttoned in evil, groomed in the habit of hatred,  
Snarling as one, barking in unison, biting together.

But now he followed, working alone, steadily followed,  
Flitting from trunk to trunk, avoiding the patches of moonlight  
Which filtered here and there through the deep tunnel of shade.

Returned to the place where that morning he had been degraded  
Before the pretty Frenchwoman, he felt cold anger return  
Almost deliciously, fixing and focusing suspicion.  
*He pressed the more intently forward, but skilled and silent*  
Still, deadly now, waiting for the expected to happen.  
Suddenly a white owl, its meditation broken  
By his approach on the landward side of the poplars,  
Widened its wings, a ghost arm-spread, shaking its shroud  
In his face. Startled, he caught his indrawn breath in a cry,  
Mastering by rule this symptom of fear. He saw the bird  
Glide before him, hardly moving the air with its motionless  
wings.

He saw it veer, sink below the bank, disappear  
Beneath the slab of moonlight roofing the washing-pool.

With the instinct of the hunter coming to the kill, he stopped,  
Waited. A moment passed, marked by the pulsing birdsong  
And the venomous beat of blood in his body. He waited, eager  
But patient, assured now of a quicker way to promotion.  
He saw the Frenchwoman come from the bridge; he saw the  
Captain

Greet her on the towpath, by the little footway to the pool.

He noted every gesture of his destined victims ;  
How the Captain pointed to the pool ; how the woman  
Responded nervously, shaking her head, seeming to urge him  
Away from this place, because of something she would conceal.

18

Confronted with gentleness, a voice subdued  
To the leaves' whisper, and almost overborne  
By the loud nightingales along the water,  
Marie stared at the officer. His hand  
Flashed through a shaft of moonlight to his head.  
He might be warding off a visible threat,  
A blow, a sword-thrust, a mass of falling rock !  
Here was no harsh, authoritative invader.  
He spoke as though in supplication, humbly,  
Reverently, with his hand before his eyes.

'This is the second time! Twice in one day  
To see her here! I heard the scissors fall  
This morning. And now the light has caught your hair  
In some familiar way that startled me.  
I saw you turn your head when you heard me coming,  
And it was she, her movement, not a stranger's!  
Do you come to warn me?'

Then, ashamed  
Of this play with phantoms, he tried to reassume  
The posture of authority. How pitiful  
It seemed to the quick wits of the Frenchwoman.  
She heard him warn her of the curfew order ;

But the admonitory voice still trembled,  
Shaken with some disturbance from the deep,  
The individual soul behind the mask.  
Recognizing his failure, he compromised  
Half-way between this duty, and the dream  
That poured the wild realities of love  
Over his moulded, military mind,  
Like perfume over granite. He tried to cover  
That moment's self-betrayal by pretence  
Of kindness, but in this second posture he failed.  
The kindness was sincere. The woman before him,  
Unknown proxy for an absent love,  
Called up that mystery of tenderness  
Which love can never disguise, nor turn aside.  
Within that personal light she stood revealed.

How often we intend to cheat, but do not!  
Cold resolutions of the political mind  
Sharpened upon the steel of principle,  
Again and again are blunted by the heart.

Marie looked at the hated uniform,  
But saw the man behind it. She bowed her head,  
Seeking to veil the pity in her eyes.  
'You must go back,' he said, 'before the patrol  
From Montigny meets the water-guard  
Here upon the bridge. The English airman  
Being still at large, the penalties are doubled.  
Quickly now!' He raised his arm and pointed  
Down the bank, beyond the washing-pool



To the path through the orchard. The heavy moonlight  
lay  
Bright yet sombre on the bridal trees  
That stood, each isolated, drenched in perfume,  
Waiting the consummation. The nightingales  
Sang in one rapturous choir the prelude of love.

‘Look!’ he said, ‘a white owl in the roof!  
There, in the old stone hut covering the pool.  
I’ll come with you, and we can find his nest.’

29

Terror is illusion ; fear  
Makes each hour a year,  
Peoples desert lands  
With murderous hands.  
Terror too is cunning,  
Sets the lapwing running,  
Makes the cringing lion  
Seem the king of beasts.  
Fear created Zion  
And man’s holy feasts.  
Terror is the shadow thrown  
Where courage like a tree has grown.  
Fear is the dark and haunted grove  
Through the holy woods of love.  
Fear and terror loom behind  
Faith’s candle shining in the mind.

Instantly, terror-driven,  
 Fearless in fear,  
 Marie responded, found herself pleading,  
 Disguising her purpose, but instantly pleading.

Turning her back on the hiding-place  
 Where the fugitive lurked,  
 She appealed to the Commandant, craving permission  
 To go to Montigny, turning permission

Cleverly to something  
 Personal, close,  
 A compact in friendship, given and taken,  
 Sentimentally given, cleverly taken.

Pitying his illusion,  
 Unaware of her own,  
 Believing it right thus to use friendship,  
 Yet scorning herself for this pitying friendship.

'I must go with you,' he said,  
 'For you may meet the patrol.  
 Come, we will follow them now,  
 Your father and sister. The other?  
 Ah yes, I know him, the lawyer  
 Who does the liaison work  
 With the new officials from Vichy.  
 He may help to save you from trouble.

And your father, will he accept  
The offer so skilfully fished for  
By your brisk young brother-by-marriage?’

From behind this cynical cloak  
Glancing furtively, shyly,  
He saw the likeness still;  
The pallor, the brown hair,  
The eyes half-clouded with thought.  
He saw his sister’s trick  
Of under-lip indrawn  
And teeth just touching its ripeness.  
Once more the blood to his head  
Flooded, and beat there madly.  
He was insane with love  
As all are insane with love  
Who crave to give and cannot,  
Who long to possess and dare not,  
Because of the ever-elusive,  
As all are insane with love  
On the rack of absence, with time  
To wind the winch of anguish  
Through faith too tightly drawn.

22

Marie watched him, her terror and fear  
Surprised and eased, but doubting still  
This change of impulse in her foe.

Studying him as he stood near,  
She saw the malady of will

Behind his eyes beat to and fro  
Like gulls blown wildly in the wake  
Of one of those mad storms that blow  
Worldwide, then suddenly pause and break.

She saw subside the maddened wings  
Behind his eyes, and in that lull  
She too found calmness, smooth and deep,  
Such as resolution brings,  
Authoritative and beautiful.

Let dread of self-betrayal sleep,  
She thought, he did not read my face  
And see the startled horror leap  
As he pointed to that hiding-place.

23

Quietly, the shadow began to glide  
Behind them as they walked toward the bridge.  
The moon made sword-blades of the glittering sedge.  
Both moved within a prison, side by side,  
Its jailer he who followed, evil-eyed,  
Its bars the moonbeams to the water's edge,  
The moon-medallions a prison-badge  
To mark two victims more for homicide.

The boyish murderer was now content  
To let them cross the bridge. He had not missed  
The woman's dreadful effort to dissuade  
The Captain from his bird-lover's intent  
To leave the path and seek the white owl's nest  
Where Eros, the young airman, might be laid.



## PART III



1

ROUND Montigny in a sickle curve  
 The river flowed, dividing meadow and wood,  
 Hardly approachable through beds of reed  
 Where lazy pools of half-returning waters  
 Still trembled in their hiding-place of rushes,  
 Shaken by the thunder of the weir.

The weir! It was an army forever passing,  
 Changing its uproar as the seasons fed  
 Or stinted it; changing but never ceasing,  
 Sometimes shaking earth with triumphant tread;  
 Shrinking through the droughts of autumn, lower  
 Than the whine of midges over the drying mud.  
 But through the years this water-music echoed  
 The equally eternal and various  
 Moods of humanity. So now it voiced  
 The soul of man weeping through the night.

2

Antoinette, the eldest daughter,  
 Ravaged with uncertainty,  
 Pleaded next. Her sunken eyes,  
 Wounded creatures crouched in a cave,  
 Needed no other eloquence.  
 Too weak to add to their appeal,



She stood before her father, hungry  
In grief, insatiable for news  
That never came. She lived on silence  
And slowly starved; flesh and blood,  
Spirit and mind in the low fever  
Of uncertainty, with the concealed  
Delirium whirling in her brain,  
Visions of indignity,  
Sickness, misery and torture,  
She saw her husband, but she dared not  
See him, for fear of what she saw;  
Somewhere, through terrifying vagueness,  
In a prison-camp in Germany.

The small hotel, crowded with women  
Herding their children out of Paris,  
Offered no privacy. The daughters  
Led their father through the garden,  
A sloping lawn to the river-edge  
By a landing-stage walled in laurels,  
And a boat-house beneath a giant  
Syringa bush pallid with blossom.

3

Half-way across the water meadows to the town,  
Marie and the Commandant met the patrol.  
They were challenged, he gave the countersign, and spoke  
fiercely  
In the harsh military fashion. Heel-clicking,

Salutes, guttural throat-noises, eyes averted,  
And the patrol was gone. The officer and the captive  
Were man and woman again. They too resumed **their way**,  
Silent, but apprehensive of the world's opinion,  
He of his fellow soldiers', she of the village folk's.

A red-pelted hare, mad belatedly in maytime,  
Sat in a patch of moonlight at the end of a tree-tunnel,  
Through whose darkness the incongruous couple approached  
Montigny.

Suddenly the long-eared fantasist began to dance,  
Drumming the dusty road with its scut, then leaping high  
In the air, beating with its forepaws, as though helpless with  
laughter.

Little spirals of dust like sacrificial smoke  
Rose round its antics at the altar of insanity.  
The silent night was filled with an illusion of sound,  
Invisible choirs of mockery marking the beat of the dance  
In which this zany of March derided the daffodil pods.

Alarmed by the advancing tread the dancer fled,  
And the road was empty again, the spirals of dust subsided.  
The only traffic now was the swift and myriad odours  
Rushing to meet the newcomers; the smell of river water  
At night, an ancient smell from lost, pre-human ages;  
The near and warmer rapture of the apple orchards;  
The comfortable stench of farm-yards; the tang of a fox;  
The night-dew on young nettles: none distinguishable  
To senses dulled with trouble, but in a rich confusion  
Pouring over their mortal faculties an immortal  
Reminder of healing.

Neither man nor woman spoke  
Of these intangible evidences, nor of the matter  
Close at their hearts, the responsibility of vision,  
Realities created in the mind alone,  
Mountainous burdens of duty and the mad conscience  
That will not rest in the weight of this world, but must build  
Others, more directly held in fief from God.

Walking side by side, sleeve touching sleeve in the moonlight,  
They came to Montigny in silence, the sound of the weir  
Gradually swelling, sleepy, but ominous and watchful.  
A halt at the gate of the garden. Then the Commandant spoke.  
His voice was indistinct, half lost in the roar of the weir  
And that louder clamour among the boulders of the mind  
Where thought's Niagara falls and foams, from birth to death.

4

See the bridge across the chasm,  
A frail gossamer of speech  
To carry over the abysm  
All the sustenance and treasure  
That the soul of man must measure  
From the ever-out-of-reach.

By this less than silken thread  
Thinner than the spider weaves,  
Both the living and the dead  
Cross where primal chaos tumbles,  
And the ancient horror rumbles  
Under the triumph man achieves.

So very little, yet so much  
That from father unto son,  
Above the menace men may touch  
In community of spirit,  
And across the gulf inherit  
All the human race has won.

5

'Do you understand? I am powerless to protect you;  
As helpless as you are! Unless you keep curfew,  
All of you suffer, your father and mother,  
Even your sisters and their young children.  
Germany rules; the world must obey her.  
There is no way out, but by willing submission.'

He spoke swiftly, stumbling after the words  
As though to recall them, change them for others  
More true to intention. But the effort failed.  
He wanted to tell her of that distant garden,  
The sister he loved and had left to die  
By the orphaned lake where the sand and laurels  
Year-long stretched in funereal mood.

Deeper even than this reminiscence,  
There clamoured for words the half-unconscious  
Acceptance of mystery, faint recognition  
Of this likeness that deluged his heart with terror  
Haunting the susceptible gothic mind  
With echoes and shadows from worlds half guessed at,

Mighty with power to undermine  
The Teutonic Reich, as the Catacombs  
Once bored under Rome, and brought it down.

Challenged by this, the lifelong divided  
Baltic lordling and dreamer of dreams  
Struggled in vain to tell this Frenchwoman  
Of substitute love, of the soul's proxy,  
Passion devoid of desire to possess,  
Humility touching on worship, and burning  
Lamps at an inward, invisible shrine.

'Persuade your father to work with us,' he said  
Returning to the gate. He raised his hand,  
About to salute, but glancing to right and left  
Furtively, despairingly, he touched her sleeve,  
And trembled as he touched. Marie could see  
The sinking moonlight gleaming in his eyes,  
Robbing them of authority. The face  
Was haunted, it already belonged to death.  
She saw a stranger to this living world  
Of harsh brutality and rule by force.  
Here was a shadow in the gentle realm  
Of all things lost, where recollection resigns  
In tenderness, compassion, and regret.

Moved by pity which she dared not grant,  
Marie turned aside. He saw her lips  
Attempt to speak, but fail. Then the familiar  
Indrawing of the underlip again  
Disturbed him. She felt the hand upon her sleeve  
Clasp, then fall away, leaving her arm

As though some wild thing had alighted **there**  
Panting with terror, but resuming flight,  
Its claw-mark on the flesh a seal of fear.

At that moment another patrol passed.  
Its leader flashed a torch, but seeing the **Captain**  
Thus occupied, he marched his men away.

This interruption called the wandering spirit  
Down to captivity. The French woman  
And German officer watched the frontiers *rise*  
Between them. He spoke again, more **urgently**;  
'Remember! You must stay here for the **night**:  
Not risk a second journey after curfew.'  
More he dared not say. His tortured **spirit**  
Shone lurid on his words, a sunset gleam  
On storm-clouds. He saluted, and was **gone**.

## 6

Directed to the garden, Marie stood  
On the lawn's edge. For evil or for good,  
She knew what lay before her, all the spent  
Stale pleadings, the conventional argument  
Frozen and formal, the reproach implied  
By sisters mad with fear, and a lawyer who lied.  
The mist from off the river touched her skin  
With fingers of foreboding. She heard the thin  
*Wing-music of midges prophesying June*.  
She heard, but did not hear, the sleepy tune  
Lagging behind the tumbling of the weir.

All sounds now came belated to her ear,  
Debarred by thought. For an eternity  
Of moments, no evidence of ear or eye  
Entered the sanctuary where she prayed  
In wordless agony, that process made  
By all religious rituals to be  
The union, the crowning mystery.  
For body, mind and soul are fused, are wrought  
Into a universe by the act of thought,  
Which instantly annihilates the three  
Divergent aspects of the trinity;  
Puts heaven, earth and hell within the span  
Of nature's changeling, individual man.  
Thought, when supreme, is greater than its sum.  
Its mathematics, as occasions come,  
Work in dimensions and through forces blown  
Cloudlike from those oceans still unknown  
Whose storms we hear far off, whose tides control  
The shore-borne traffic of the human soul.

A sound of weeping by the river bank  
Broke the spell. Marie's vision sank  
Into the neighbourhood of the April night.  
Her eyes resumed their blind and normal sight,  
Her ears were deafened once again with hearing.  
She heard the music of the river veering  
Around its monotone, to a rhythm controlled  
From some unearthly world, so calm, so old  
That all mad harmonies of joy and rage  
Were lost in the level counterpoint of age.

The odour of the moving water crept  
Into the summer perfumes where they slept  
Above the sleeping flowers. It salted earth  
With recollections of that dim pre-birth  
Which lingers through our childhood, and maybe  
Gives to old age its last humility.

The moon was drawing westward. Silver shone  
The weir, firm and smooth, a polished bone,  
A wall of water motionless as rock.  
It stood within a seething, writhing shock  
Of serpents, on whose fanged and venomous madness  
The sleep-inducing moonlight looked with sadness,  
And tried, but tried in vain, to veil the sight  
With half-transparencies of broken light,  
A lullaby made visible, a pale  
Fabric coloured out of music's scale.

It was her sister Antoinette who wept.  
Crossing the lawn and gravel, Marie stepped  
Down to the landing-stage. Each sodden plank  
Was plucked by little ripples that lipped the dank  
Underside, which moss and green-slime cloaked,  
Where bull-frogs in their mating concourse croaked.

A pleasure-boat was moored there; in it seated  
A woman, bent and utterly defeated.  
Gently, as though bewildered, the small craft  
Nudged and rubbed and creaked against the raft



Where the Professor and his escort stood  
Beneath a willow canopy, a hood  
That curtained them in newly-broken gold.

Marie looked at them. Her mind went cold  
With misery. She saw in that small group  
The last abandonment of human hope.  
The figure in the boat, dear Antoinette  
The well-beloved, the soul without regret,  
The gay of heart who lived and reigned a queen,  
Taught by the gods at birth to be serene;  
Dear Antoinette, bowed down, weeping alone,  
Lost in a universe no more her own!  
Overwhelming wordless eloquence  
Stronger than Gabrielle's angry arguments  
Flowed from the very posture of such grief.  
Marie knew there could be no relief  
From this. Her father, who had found a way  
To keep all importunity at bay,  
Each plea through politics or family,  
Could not look on and see a spirit die;  
Dear uncomplaining Antoinette, the brave,  
Always more rich in love the more she gave.

7

Marie approached no further. Stepping aside,  
She waited in the shadow of the laurels,  
Defeated. She watched the moon grow large and touch  
The western woods, heroic as it sank.

She saw her father so, a lonely figure  
Ennobled by his selfless resignation,  
This sacrifice for his own honour  
For one who would not plead with him to **do it**,  
But sat alone, fighting her lost battle  
And dying inwardly from wounds of grief.

No birds sang near the river: only the weir  
Raving as a witless madman raves  
Sunk in unremembered trouble. The moon  
Went down, and darkness filtered through the stars.  
The whole world now was shadow. Light withdrew  
Behind its hood of petal, flesh and stone.  
And glimmered there, setting the shapes of things  
To mark an earth not totally destroyed.

The old man left his daughter and her husband,  
And leaning over the boat, touched Antoinette.  
All were ghost-figures in a world of ghosts,  
Groping for more than they could understand.  
'My dear,' he said; and Marie heard his voice  
Broken in the darkness, feeling blindly  
Toward her soul. 'I will accept the offer;  
On the condition that parole be given  
To bring your husband home.'

Marie shrank  
Further into the darkness under the laurels,  
Step by step retreating upon herself  
Into a solitude made absolute  
By this surrender. She dared not look again.  
She dared not think, for fear she might accuse

Her father of the sin that was no sin,  
The worst ill deed of all, that done with knowledge,  
Godlike detachment, for another's sake.  
With senses sharpened in this trance of thought,  
She heard the waters open to a roar  
Like brass proclaiming this new dispensation,  
This change of dynasty. The gentle night  
Went down before the tumult in her mind,  
Dragging the universe. Then all subsided  
And left the stars and flowers at their stations,  
And her amid them, born a second time,  
Inheriting this kingdom. Resolute,  
Crowned with her new authority, she moved  
Disguised through the tree-shadows. Reaching the house,  
She mingled with the guests, and still compelled  
By this new light, the lamp within her mind,  
She borrowed from the inn some bread and wine,  
A towel to roll them in, and a small basket  
In which to offer this dangerous sacrament  
Beside the pool, for her the shrine of Eros,  
Where she believed the English airman hid.

8

Quick! Quick!  
Count the beat  
Of marching feet.  
Add the sum  
As they come,  
Of tyranny's arithmetic.

Tramp! Tramp!  
All as one,  
Freedom gone.  
On they roll,  
Death's patrol,  
To crush the rebel, douse the lamp.

Thud! Thud!  
Smash the door,  
Tread the floor.  
Man or mouse  
Shall have no house  
Now that public Moloch's god!

Out! Out!  
Privacy  
Is a lie,  
Reason  
Treason.  
Learn the slogan, learn the shout!

Crush! Crush!  
Tame the wild,  
Train the child.  
Let the mother  
Sing another  
Lullaby than 'Hush! Hush!'

Boom! Boom!  
Let no diet  
Of sweet quiet

Feed the mind  
Of mankind.  
Individual, hear your doom!

Quick! Quick!  
Louder beat  
The stamping feet.  
Add the sum  
As they come,  
Of the mob's arithmetic!

9

Biting his finger-nails to the quick, the Lieutenant stands  
Eaten within by trained, strengthened, perverted passion,  
Waiting by the bridge, stamping up and down,  
Up and down on foreign ground to maintain his courage.

Triumph to-night has dulled the familiar, anxious gnawing.  
He sees a new security within his grasp;  
Promotion, a step nearer the Leader, a chance to destroy  
This dangerous individual, the Commandant,  
Whom he hates without knowing he hates, for causes beyond  
his ken.

Waiting by the bridge, he sees the moon go down.  
The poplar trees draw close together, almost moved  
From whispering to outcry, a murmur of open rebellion.  
He sees their shapes outlined against the western sky  
Where bronze halations tremble, after the moon has dropped.

The air begins to shift. The night's conspiracy  
Adds nothing unto nothing. Some of the brightened stars  
Grow dull again, resume their fire, then disappear.  
The trees are now in open cry, their voices shrill  
And rapid. Then the agitation falls away,  
And raindrops, with their little velvet footsteps, run  
Along the leaves, the grass, the waters, silent on the dust.

The shower passes; and a planet reappears.  
The Lieutenant, from his shelter under the arch of the bridge,  
Comes up to the road again. He sees the hour grows late.  
The Town Patrol and the River Patrol are due to return,  
But he hears nothing except the aftermath of the shower,  
The last drops sliding from leaf to leaf, down to the earth.  
Frogs in the brackish dykes on the landward side of the banks  
Again take up their croaking, creaking like cracked leather;  
And somewhere in the marsh a muffled nightjar drums.  
These, the multitudinous, the tread of night,  
The myriad-footed army of freedom, the hosts of summer  
Moving against the total mastery of ice  
And uniform of winter, these are all he hears  
Patiently advancing against his perverted youth.  
Fear chills him again. He curses the noisy silence,  
The soft, caressing atmosphere of decadent France.

Bring what I understand, he prays to his brittle god,  
Bring soldiers drilled to the word of command, with eyes  
directed  
To duty. But after the wordless, mindless prayer, instinct,  
Since boyhood overtrained, breaks from its restraint

And rages, with tusks to earth, in the forest of his soul,  
Rooting for luscious pain, lusting for taste of blood.  
Stamping his feet upon the bridge, he treads the world,  
Sagittarius the stag, savagely tossing his antlers.

10

Nothing is said  
With the tread, tread  
Of the feet.  
Heel and toe,  
Machines in a row,  
Shining complete,  
Polished and neat.  
Silence has fled,  
Beating instead  
In the tread, tread  
Of the feet.

No human word.  
Only the guard,  
Ten men as one.  
The nightingale's gone;  
The mouse and frog  
Seek earth, seek bog.  
Stars, one by one,  
Shrink inward and shun  
An earth feigning dead  
To the tread, tread  
Of the guard.

The something less than god upon the bridge  
 Heard the patrols approaching. Rage and fear  
 Subsided as authority drew near.  
 Once more the confidence of privilege  
 Calmed him. He preened his uniform, and fingered  
 His lips, to make them firm and adamant.  
 Here to his grasp was all that he could want.  
 But still within his soul the terror lingered.  
 They neared, and met. The formal words were said,  
 No incident reported. After this  
 The officer should salute them, and dismiss  
 Each to resume its clockwork beat. Instead  
 He took six men, as one would take a tool,  
 And set his hidden trap behind the pool.

The Commandant returned to his Headquarters  
 And sat in solitude. He tried to work,  
 Sorting the day's accumulation of forms.  
 The church clock struck eleven. One by one  
 The aged, half-broken mouthings of the bell  
 Rolled over the town and echoed from the river.  
 He counted each of them, and heard it float  
 Like memory away, the recollection  
 Of time itself, with every private treasure



Hoarded from the past against the harsh  
And too-insistent horrors of to-day.  
He saw the plains of Poland, the roads of France  
Blocked with civilians under the German bombers.

The imagination of the thinking man  
Fled from this, to seek a sanctuary  
In earlier scenes; the garden in the North  
With Christmas snows untrodden. He saw the room,  
Threadbare, yet rich with vanished generations,  
And lying amid a confusion of books—his sister.  
She was reading aloud. He cared not what she said:  
The voice was enough, hesitant with thought  
And habit of solitude. He heard her pause  
To cough, regain her breath, ignoring, the break  
With a grave dignity that struck to his heart.  
How gracious the lamplight on her hair! Disease  
Could not impair that beauty. He saw it now,  
A thousand miles away. He saw the hollow  
Under her throat, the blood-pulse in its shadow  
After the struggle for breath. 'Now let me read,'  
He cried. So close, so vivid was the illusion,  
That he cried the words aloud, and broke the trance.

But the agony remained, the craving to stand  
Protecting her, driving death away,  
Holding her to life with tenderesses  
Infinite and sleepless. But now the wolves  
Ranged unopposed, approaching from the forest,

Curdling the snow. He felt them drawing near  
Across the park, to prowling about the house,  
Their eyes glinting coldly under the moon.

So, crossing and re-crossing between two worlds,  
He lost command of both. He could not work,  
He could not dream. The torture of indecision  
Drove him, still on the edge of fantasy,  
To seek the place where he had seen her standing  
Dew-bathed, restored to health and life and laughter,  
With a basket on her hip in the dappled light  
Amid a flight of petals by the pool.  
But now she stood in danger. He must hurry,  
And stand between her and the wolves of death.

13

Waiting now! The earth is waiting  
After the moon has gone.  
The rhythm of the night alone  
Bears what fate is contemplating,  
The unknowable, but known.

Over our clarity of thought  
Broods God's shapeless cloud.  
Through all action willed and wrought  
By confusion of our blood,  
Shines the starlight mind of God.

Opposite, and thus completing  
All our pain and joy,  
Stands the enigmatic boy,

Blindfold, yet by vision meting  
Decision through the arrows fleeting  
From his dangerous toy.

After the moonshine and the shower,  
Cooled with starlight, damp  
With the rain's close, fragrant power,  
Earth is waiting. And love's lover  
Comes, her faith her faithless lamp.

14

Night was luminous with rain. Each drop,  
Shrinking to pear-shape from the humid cloud,  
Carried some faint reflection from the stars,  
A tiny moon to them; or shone as pearl  
With powdery light caught from the Milky Way.  
By number, not by strength, they lit the earth,  
And Marie trod the road from Montigny  
Guided by a myriad of lamps.

They made a music too, a music of mirrors,  
Discords of light resolving instantly  
Into the steady unison of rain,  
A voice, a touch, calling and caressing,  
Urgent as the mission in her heart.  
Beside the road she saw another fire  
Colder than the rain, the little lanterns  
Lighted by glow-worms at the shrine of love.

The fear that lurks in all brave resolution  
Had frozen every thought. Her mind was **fixed**  
Toward one purpose, only half-divined.  
In this strange but universal trance  
The world's great deeds are done by man or beast,  
Under the authority of instinct  
When gods or monsters seize the reins of thought  
And drive us as they will, beyond our power,  
Blinding us, that we may reach the goal.

As Marie approached the shrine, old earth **responded**  
With ampler offerings to love's ritual.  
The perfume of the honey-blossom deepened  
Through the distribution of the rain:  
Belated daffodils, faint for the underworld,  
Half-distinguishable odours of death,  
Enriched love's body with their ghostliness.  
The grasses and the moss, the insignificant  
Flowers that the bee pretends to pass  
But turns to, and finds in them its greatest **treasure**,  
All these combined to offer their oblation,  
Humble, but all-pervasive. Marie walked  
Already robed and priested to love's shrine,  
Unconscious of the sanctity which night  
Had put upon her; the glow-worm lamps,  
With dew for a dalmatic. In her arms  
She carried bread and wine, the universal  
Symbol of love, and of love's sacrifice.

The Commandant first reached the pool. He stopped  
 Beneath the trees, and watched the gleams that dropped  
 Heavily from the leaves and broke across  
 The path, loud on the stone, silent on the moss.

Some swift intelligence between his two  
 Divided selves, now told him what to do.  
 He stood behind a judas-tree, to wait  
 For what might come. He did not hesitate,  
 Or question this deceptive certainty  
 Born of heart-sickness for a northern sky  
 Where love lay bleeding. He could see the stone  
 But dimly now. Although the moon was gone,  
 The stone gleamed faintly, for the air was light  
 After the rain had made the stars more bright  
 And burnished every surface till there shone  
 A star-bright replica from leaf and stone.

He heard her footstep on the bridge. He heard  
 The dampness as she turned into the furred  
 And mossy path between the dripping bushes  
 And the canal-bank blurred with water-rushes.  
 He heard her come: suddenly the night  
 Showed where she walked through a diffusion of light  
 Caught from the microscopic lustres thrown  
 Across the watery air like star-dust blown.  
 He saw her unprotected. He saw her lost  
 And unaware, this other self, this ghost  
 Approaching him, familiar yet strange,  
 Forever close, forever out of range.

Then seeing him, she stopped before the pool.  
Silence fell about her. Only the cool  
Drip, drip, dropping from leaf to moss.  
He tried to speak to her. He moved across  
The portal, breaking through the dripping cordon  
To touch her hand, and take the sacred burden,  
The basket with the bread and wine. They stood  
Facing each other above the holy food.

‘You knew I should come back?’ she said. ‘I knew,’  
He answered, gravely. ‘Because I have known you  
Since life began.’ She could not understand,  
But let him take her once more by the hand,  
And watched him set the basket down behind  
The corner-stone, for the lost god to find,  
The god in any winged disguise, by chance  
A white owl, or an airman down in France.

‘My father has agreed,’ she said. ‘I heard  
Them in the garden. . . .’ But suddenly a word  
Shoots from the darkness: then the triggers click.  
He leaps in front of her, ‘Come quick! Quick!’  
And seizes her, and tries to make her run.  
But on all sides they face a levelled gun.

Action is ever present. Action is now,  
The storm beneath which love and thought must bow.  
Silence again. Then the Lieutenant’s shout—  
And Eros stands revealed beyond all doubt.

Now all things are changing, earth  
 Destroys itself in a new birth.  
 Mountains, as was prophesied,  
 Vanish, and the seas have dried.  
 Corn is withered, and no green  
 Leaf upon the tree is seen.  
 Silent, lifeless in light's glare  
 The moon-scape of the world lies bare.

Time runs down, and as it ceases,  
 Star-denuded space releases  
 All that has been, all that is,  
 All our future histories.  
 In this break of logic's chain  
 Cause and effect no more remain  
 Dictators of our destiny.

The mathematics of the sky  
 Lose their cog-wheeled potency,  
 And incalculable slumber  
 Seals the eye of godlike Number;  
 Godlike, but not yet the son  
 Of the shell-borne beauty blown  
 Out of spindrift, out of foam  
 To the soul of man, her home.

Now the moment comes for all  
 Religions' final festival;

The trial, the torture, the last breath  
Of God in man, the deathless death;  
The sojourn in the sepulchre;  
The miracle of bones that stir  
Within the cerecloth; the great stone  
Rolled back, and one who walks alone  
Still faithful through this dark and damp  
Solstice of life, bearing a lamp.

27

The empty shrine is ready to receive  
Love's last illusion, love's last offering.  
Here is the cause why death shall have no sting  
For such as these two victims, who achieve  
No material victory, yet live  
Beyond their folly and loss of everything.  
Wisdom, the white owl, has taken wing.  
Pray that the executioner be brief.

Pray, but even as the ambush bites,  
Forget to pity them, for they have found  
The lover whom they sought, the self made whole,  
The god unseen through all life's anguished nights.  
Now someone moves across the blood-stained ground.  
'Tis Psyche, lamp in hand, the immortal soul.



## BOOKS BY RICHARD CHURCH

### *Poetry.*

THE FLOOD OF LIFE	1917
HURRICANE	1919
PHILIP	1923
THE PORTRAIT OF THE ABBOT	1926
THE DREAM	1927
THEME WITH VARIATIONS	1928
MOOD WITHOUT MEASURE	1928
THE GLANCE BACKWARD	1930
NEWS FROM THE MOUNTAIN	1932
TWELVE NOON	1936
THE SOLITARY MAN	1941
TWENTIETH-CENTURY PSALTER	1943
TWENTY POEMS (LIMITED EDITION)	1946

### *Novels.*

OLIVER'S DAUGHTER	1930
HIGH SUMMER	1931
THE PRODIGAL FATHER	1933
THE APPLE OF CONCORD	1935
THE PORCH	1937
THE STRONGHOLD	1939
THE ROOM WITHIN	1940
THE SAMPLER	1942

### *Essays:*

MARY SHELLEY	1928
CALLING FOR A SPADE	1939
EIGHT FOR IMMORTALITY	1941
PLATO'S MISTAKE	1941
BRITISH AUTHORS	1943
GREEN TIDE (REPRINTING) .	1945
KENT (IN PREPARATION)	

### *For Children*

A SQUIRREL CALLED RUFUS	1941
-------------------------	------

